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Bedford Township wrongful dismissal trial date to be set Ex-finance director suing the township

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TEMPERANCE - The trial date in a defamation and wrongful termination lawsuit filed against Bedford Township officials by former Finance Director Michael McMillian could be known later this month.

A pretrial conference with attorneys for the township's insurance carrier and Mr. McMillian is scheduled for Aug. 28 with the clerk of Washtenaw County Circuit Court Judge Melinda Morris, said Richard Meier, the attorney representing Mr. McMillian. The lawsuit was filed in April against the township, Clerk Robert Schockman, and Treasurer Sherri Meyer.

It was sent to Judge Morris after the three judges in Monroe County Circuit Court excused themselves to avoid the appearance of impropriety because of a potential conflict of interest.

Mr. McMillian was fired by the township board in November after he had been on the job for about a year. In his lawsuit against the officials, Mr. McMillian claims that statements Mr. Schockman and Ms. Meyer made to the Blade in January over his termination were false.

Specifically at issue were quotes attributed to Mr. Schockman that "the job was bigger than what [McMillian] could handle, he was like a duck out of water," and the statement made by Ms. Meyer that "government accounting is different than regular accounting, and we really needed somebody who understands that."

Mr. McMillian said in the lawsuit that he demanded that the officials retract their comments, but that to date that had not happened. He claims that the officials placed him in a false light and he had not been able to secure employment prior to filing the complaint.

The lawsuit also claims that township officials failed to follow policies under state law in the termination process, including permitting him to address allegations that prompted the board action in November. The lawsuit asks the court to compensate him for lost wages and benefits and seeks undetermined damages, attorney fees, and legal costs in a judgment against the defendants.

Supervisor Walt Wilburn declined comment on the complaint's allegations, and referred questions to David Landry, an attorney for the township's insurance carrier. He could not be reached for comment. A former finance department employee for the city of Toledo, Mr. McMillian was hired in November, 2006, to handle the township's financial affairs.

At the time of his dismissal, township officials, including Mr. Schockman and Ms. Meyer, gave little explanation for the board action, but pointed to examples of errors such as a payment for a sewer department expense being marked incorrectly as a credit to the sewer fund.